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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HANOI 001729

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DOD FOR DPMO

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DASD JENNINGS' MEETINGS WITH SENIOR GVN OFFICIALS

1. (U) Summary. In meetings with a range of GVN leaders in Hanoi and HCMC, DASD Jennings and staff reached agreement on the archival research initiative; assessed positively the utility of continuing the wartime leaders interview initiative; reiterated USG priority for underwater recovery operations, with technical details to be worked out by both sides in the coming months; and received authorization to visit the Central Highlands to explore recovery operations there. He presented additional USG information on missing PAVN soldiers. GVN officials reiterated strong support for continued and enhanced cooperation on MIAs, and indicated clearly that they would look favorably on requests for new recovery operations in the Central Highlands. End Summary.

Hanoi/HCMC schedule

2. (U) DASD Jerry Jennings and staff held a series of separate meetings in Hanoi June 14 and 15 with senior GVN leaders, including:

- Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung;
- Deputy Foreign Minister Le Van Bang;
- Deputy Minister of Defense Colonel General Nguyen Huy Hieu;
- Vice Minister of Public Security Lt. General Nguyen Van Huong;
- Assistant Foreign Minister Nguyen Duc Hung;
- Vice Chairperson of the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee Ton Nu Thi Ninh; and,
- National Deputy Chairman of Vietnam Veterans Association Tran Hanh.

3. (U) DASD Jennings met with the following officials in HCMC on June 16:

- Brigadier General Nguyen Van Be, Deputy Commander of Military Region (MR) 7;
- Senior Colonel Vu Ngoc Tuyen, Commander of the 125th Navy Brigade;
- Ambassador Ha Van Lau, former Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs; and,
- Dr. Nguyen Thien Nhan, First Vice Chairman of the HCMC People's Committee.

4. (U) DASD Jennings' delegation consisted of:

- Ms. Melinda Cooke, senior policy director for POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO), DOD;
- LtCol. Phuong Pierson, policy advisor, DPMO;
- Gary Sydow, director of research and analysis for DPMO;
- SFC Gary Grisdale, ADMIN NCO, DPMO;
- Ronald Ward, interpreter, Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, PACOM.

A/DCM Bellard and Navy/Marine Attache Etnyre accompanied on calls with the senior GVN officials in Hanoi.

USG Message

5. (U) DASD Jennings' main message focused on:

- Archival research initiative: while expressing his personal opinion that no GVN officials were deliberately withholding information from their files, DASD Jennings noted that often officials may not know exactly what is in their files, and therefore a thorough review of files from the central to the local levels was an important next step. After negotiations with VNOSMP staff, the two sides on June 15 reached agreement on this project, which will not only permit access to MOD files related to POW/MIAs at all levels but leave open the possibility of access to files of the Office of the Prime Minister, MFA, and MPS, should leads develop to those organizations;
- Wartime leaders initiative: DASD Jennings reiterated the importance of continuing this initiative and welcomed senior GVN support for this project, as had been signaled clearly two years ago by General Vo Nguyen Giap himself. DASD Jennings conducted two such interviews during this visit (septel);
- Underwater recovery initiative: DASD Jennings noted the importance of this effort not only to recovering US remains but also in helping the GVN identify crash sites of Vietnamese planes, which could possibly lead to the recovery of Vietnamese KIAs. Vietnam had also lost planes over water, and the US would be willing to share technology and

information. He noted that technical talks, led on the US side by PACOM under Admiral Fargo, were continuing, and he expressed confidence in reaching agreement by year's end. He noted, however, that the Vietnamese vessels he had visited did not have sufficient deck space for major recovery operations. He reminded his GVN interlocutors that the two sides had conducted four earlier joint underwater recovery operations, once with success (two sets of remains), and highlighted the importance of moving forward on this cooperation;

-- Central Highlands: Noting that our teams had not had access to this area since 2002, DASD Jennings requested permission to resume operations there. VMPS Huong welcomed DASD Jennings to go anywhere in this area anytime he liked, "even tomorrow." Vice DefMin Hieu, however, cited some security concerns due to the remote locations. DASD Jennings indicated that he would like to make a first visit in late July before the four-nation conference in Siem Reap.

16. (U) Additionally, DASD Jennings presented US documentation about PAVN losses and possible recovery opportunities to DPM Dung, Vice DefMin Hieu, and VFM Bang, all of whom welcomed this latest assistance from the USG. He also described the upcoming conference in Siem Reap involving MIA officials from the U.S., Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos, to exchange experiences and to look for ways to enhance cooperation. GVN interlocutors indicated their willingness to participate, as in 2003. DASD Jennings also noted the important occasions he will have in August 2004 when speaking to US veterans groups like the American Legion to highlight Vietnamese cooperation on MIAs, especially the new agreement on archival research.

GVN responses

17. (U) DPM Dung expressed GVN appreciation for USG cooperation, particularly the latest information presented about PAVN losses. He reiterated the consistent policy of the GVN to treat the search for MIAs as a "humanitarian issue," and the GVN's willingness to do "everything in its power" to ensure effective cooperation. He noted that, "frankly, we do not want US remains left in Vietnam." He wished success for the new archival research initiative. He urged use of a Vietnamese Navy ship for underwater recovery, with possible additional US equipment. He called for more US assistance, also on a humanitarian basis, on unexploded ordnance and for victims of Agent Orange, including clean up of some major sites near Danang and Thanh Hoa.

18. (U) VFM Bang voiced support for the major initiatives, while noting that the Vietnamese Army did not want a US Navy vessel to conduct the underwater recovery operations, preferring a Vietnamese vessel or a third country vessel. He promised that the GVN wanted to "work with you better," while admitting that this was a "sensitive time," particularly due to US elections. He promised that the MFA would continue to "push the envelope" to achieve even greater cooperation on MIAs.

19. (U) VMPS Huong noted that MPS had been involved in MIA searches for 14 years now and that this "final stage" was the "most difficult." He reiterated GVN policy to "cooperate fully." He expressed support for DASD Jennings' initiatives, while pointing to MPS' earlier archival searches, the results of which had already been transferred to MOD and then to the U.S. He noted that using a Vietnamese vessel equipped with US technology in the South China Seas was "better" because it had "no implications for any other country." He promised to "create favorable conditions" for DASD Jennings' visit to the Central Highlands, "even tomorrow," and said the GVN was "ready" to facilitate once the two sides agreed on the location, timing, etc.

10. (U) Vice DefMin Hieu promised that the GVN and MOD would do the "utmost" to resolve the MIA issue, while urging the USG "take responsibility" to "lessen suffering" caused by unexploded ordnance and Agent Orange. He expressed appreciation for USG goodwill in presenting additional information about PAVN losses. He insisted that Vietnamese ships were adequate for underwater recovery operations, but welcomed possible additional US-provided equipment, such as had been provided for UXO searches. He promised MOD support for visits to the Central Highlands, while noting that these would have to be planned on a step-by-step basis given "safety" considerations; remote locations and lack of medical evacuation options could make such efforts "dangerous."

11. (U) DASD Jennings briefed officials in HCMC on his meetings in Hanoi, and they pledged continued cooperation with his four major initiatives. Brigadier General Be gratefully accepted US archival materials on Vietnamese wartime losses from DASD Jennings, noting that such information had led to the recovery of significant numbers

of Vietnamese KIAs in the past. Senior Colonel Tuyen noted that his command was still awaiting the necessary GVN permissions it needed to provide a vessel for underwater search and recovery operations, but promised to work closely with DASD Jennings in resolving any technical issues and identifying an appropriate Vietnamese vessel. He reaffirmed the invitation for US Navy technical experts to view his sailors in action, and appreciated DASD Jennings' offer to follow up on the status of technical assessment reports. Dr. Nhan noted that the agreement on archival research reflected a high degree of mutual trust between the two governments.

112. (U) Comment: While not explicitly authorizing resumption of recovery operations by JPAC teams in the Central Highlands -- in contrast to a clear blessing for a visit by DASD Jennings -- GVN officials gave clear indications that they would likely look favorably on at least some specific requests for such operations on a case by case basis. End comment.

113. (U) This message has been cleared by DASD Jennings' staff.
PORTER